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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews the student teacher failure literature and describes a study on the causes of failure, noting implications for teacher education institutions. The study involved a systematic analysis of the files of student teachers who failed at one university from 1994-97. Failure of student teaching was defined as either choosing to quit student teaching or being removed from the experience. Results were coded as personal characteristics, performance indicators, or contextual factors. Results identified age, gender, number of previous institutions attended, and lower grades in methods classes as demographic characteristics of students who failed. The single biggest reason for students to withdraw from student teaching was the decision that teaching was not for them. Personal circumstances were another primary reason for failure. Regarding performance indicators, students who failed displayed multiple skill deficiencies. Students who failed for contextual reasons usually did so because of conflict with cooperating teachers or placements. The paper presents a number of ways teacher education institutions can address the causes of failure, ranging from pre-admission screening to early field placement, counseling, selecting and educating cooperating teachers carefully, and documenting the internship. (Contains 29 references.) (SM)

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Learning from Student Teacher Failure:

Implications for Program Design

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Author's Sketches

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Abstract

Emerging national teaching standards and the increased attention to performance-based assessments of teachers' capabilities require teacher educators to reevaluate many of their program elements. To assist in this evaluation, we present a review of the student teacher failure literature, a new study on the causes of failure, and implications for teacher education institutions. We build on a growing body of institutional studies, survey research, and case studies. In this study we identify age, gender, number of previous institutions attended, and lower grades in methods classes as demographic characteristics of students who fail. We present the personal characteristics, skill deficiencies, and contextual factors that contributed to the failure of our students. Finally, we present a number of ways teacher education institutions can address the causes of failure, ranging from pre-admission screening to early field placement, counseling, selecting and educating cooperating teachers carefully, and documenting the internship.

Learning From Student Teacher Failure:

Implications for Program Design

The emerging national standards of teaching excellence provide a basis for reflection about teacher education programs. In addition to examining what makes an excellent teacher, it is also important to consider factors which may prevent teacher certification candidates from meeting these standards. Although it is often difficult for professional teacher educators to discuss the failure of their students, doing so provides important information to guide us in the selection, education, counseling, and mentoring of potential teachers. Identifying factors that contribute to student teacher failure can provide needed information for sound decision-making about how to structure more effective teacher education programs.

Our own experiences as college of education faculty and student teacher supervisors led us to this study, which is designed to add to the existing knowledge base describing why some pre-service teachers fail what is typically the final performance evaluation prior to certification. For student teacher supervisors, nothing is more wrenching than failing a student during an internship; students who fail face an often devastating loss of money, time, self-esteem, and career focus. Additionally, since student teaching supervision generally requires a one-to-one coaching experience, the financial investment made by teacher education institutions is substantial. Because colleges of education rely on host schools and master teachers to facilitate the student teaching process, reducing the number of failures will help ensure continued amicable relationships with local school systems. Every teacher education program faces the challenge of working with students who fail or at risk of failing. In this chapter, we

review the literature on student teacher failure, present results from our own institutional analysis, and consider implications for teacher education programs.

We were guided by the following four research questions: 1) What are the demographic characteristics of those students who are unsuccessful in completing student teaching internships? 2) What background variables, performance in the teacher education sequence, or other variables enable us to predict who will succeed or fail during student teaching? 3) How can we identify students at risk for failure and target skills development or provide career counseling for them? and 4) What are the implications of this study for our program admissions, course sequencing, counseling of students, and student teacher supervision?

Literature Review – What Do We Know About Failure?

Much of the research in teacher education focuses on describing course content, novice teachers, and school reform issues. A limited amount of systematic research on the causes for student teacher failure exists, and the matter has received little attention in journals and conference presentations. The dearth of research data led Sudzina and Knowles (1992) to conclude that "the scant attention to the matter of 'failure' in the research literature verifies the need for more research on the matter" (p. 26). The absence of data was noted by Zeichner and Gore (1990) nearly a decade ago, and may reflect a perception that failure is a relatively infrequent phenomenon (Guyton & McIntyre, 1990; Johnson & Yates, 1982). In our own review of the literature we found only four comparable institutional studies (Hall & Serna, 1992; Offutt, 1995; Sudzina & Knowles, 1993; Sudzina, Giebelhaus & Coolican, 1997) and two reports of survey research (Knowles, Skrobola, & Coolican, 1995; Rickman & Hallowell, 1981). We also located

single and multiple case study reports of student teacher failure. In this section we review the existing research which guided our inquiry.

Institutional Studies

The four reports we located share some consistencies and contain some differences in findings. Several personal characteristics have been identifies as contributing to failure, including poor interpersonal skills (Hall & Serna, 1992; Sudzina & Knowles, 1993), shy, quiet personalities (Offut, 1995; Sudzina & Knowles, 1993), lack of commitment or enthusiasm (Offut, 1995; Sudzina & Knowles, 1993), or an inability to accept criticism and lack of professionalism (Hall & Serna, 1992). In addition, a few researchers mention that failed student teachers often came to teaching after attempting other careers (Offut, 1995; Sudzina & Knowles, 1993). Skill deficiencies included difficulty planning lessons (Hall & Serna, 1992) and classroom management problems (Hall & Serna, 1992; Sudzina & Knowles, 1993).

Demographic characteristics related to failure include age, gender, and grade point average. Older students fail more often than younger students (Sudzina & Knowles, 1993; Hall & Serna, 1992), although young females were overrepresented in the failure group in one sample (Sudzina & Knowles, 1993). Grade point averages were lower for failed students in one sample (Sudzina & Knowles, 1993) and males failed more often than females in two studies (Hall & Serna, 1992; Sudzina & Knowles, 1993).

Two primary contextual factors are reported as contributing to failure. A misunderstanding of the school culture or needs of students was cited by Sudzina Knowles (1993), and lack of mentoring or cooperating teacher conflicts by Sudzina, Giebelhaus & Coolican (1997). These reports highlight the importance of congruent expectations, matching philosophies and pedagogical approaches, and a willingness to

mentor (and accept mentoring) in making the cooperating teacher-student teacher relationship work; these findings are consistent with previous studies (Lowther, 1970).

Survey Research

Reported survey research provides further detail about what contributes to failure. Experienced university supervisors identify classroom management and discipline problems, the inability to relate well with students, poor teaching methods, and a lack of commitment to the profession as primary reasons for failure (Rickman & Hollowell, 1981). Another survey of supervisors (Knolwes, Skrobola, & Coolican, 1995) reports poor planning, inability to meet students' needs or develop relationships with students, and classroom environment issues cited as central reasons for student teacher failure. As Johnson and Yates (1982) note, supervisors are a logical source of information, since they are the final judges of whether a student fails or succeeds.

Case Study Reports

Several case studies of unsuccessful student teachers also contribute to our knowledge base of what causes failure. Throughout these varying reports, problems related to personal characteristics of students, performance deficits, and contextual factors again surface as reasons contributing to students' failure.

Several researchers have identified various personal characteristics, including personality traits, physical traits, and philosophical positions, that might lead to failure. Students described in case studies as shy, socially awkward, unassertive or possessing low self-confidence are included in case studies by Schmidt and Knowles (1995). Other personality traits that may cause difficulty for students are being too assertive, nervous, or self-conscious (Alilunas, 1977) or being quiet and anxious (Knowles & Hoefler, 1989). Physical characteristics which became problematic include diminutive height and

excessive weight (Riner & Jones, 1995) and being petite (Knolwes & Hoefler, 1989). In addition, problems in student teachers' personal lives may contribute to tensions which result in their failure (deVoss, 1981; Mayer & Goldsberry, 1993).

Performance deficits, including lack of planning, management, or interpersonal skills, were evident in many of the case study reports. A reluctance to turn assignments in on time (Mayer & Goldsberry, 1993), poor planning skills and an inability to manage a classroom successfully, or some combination of skills deficits (Schmidt & Knowles, 1995; Riner & Jones, 1995) have been reported as central elements in case studies of failure.

Contextual factors--including the congruency of student teacher/cooperating teacher beliefs; sensitive, supportive university supervisors; and a "manageable environment"—may also contribute to failure (deVoss, 1981). Many researchers note the importance of selecting sponsoring teachers and supervisors. Problems can arise when cooperating teachers and interns differ in their views of teaching or discipline strategies (Mayer & Goldsberry, 1993) or when expectations and responsibilities are not articulated or are not compatible (Allen, 1986; Sudzina & Coolican, 1994). Further, philosophical dissonance—a dissatisfaction with the system of schooling—was as indicated as a factor contributing to student teacher failure (deVoss, 1981; Knowles & Hoefler, 1989).

Summary

When the results of published institutional studies are combined with information from survey research and case studies, a few consistent patterns begin to emerge. Student teacher failure is caused by a wide variety of factors, including personal characteristics of the individual students, poor skills, and contextual elements. Demographic characteristics that seem to be important include age, gender, academic performance and

number of previous occupations. Personality characteristics, ranging from quiet and shy personalities to those that are overly assertive, may be problematic. In addition, contextual factors such as the relationship between student teachers and cooperating teachers, or placement in a culturally familiar setting may be important. In the following sections, we add to this knowledge base through a systematic analysis of the files of student teachers who have failed at our university.

Method

Sample

This study includes data from 1994-1997 at a mid-sized (11,300 students) state university. The sample includes the files of 35 secondary student teachers (those certified to teach grades 4-12) from undergraduate, post-baccalaureate, and masters certification programs who failed their student teaching. We compared the failure group to a randomly selected representative comparison group of 98 successful interns. Because other researchers had indicated that demographic characteristics might be significant in assessing failure, we recorded the following characteristics for each group: gender; cumulative grade point average; grades for two teaching methods courses; age of the student teacher; and level of placement, either middle school or high school.

For the purposes of this study, failure of student teaching is defined as either choosing to quit student teaching or being removed from the experience, usually by the student teaching supervisor or by request of public school personnel. For the years between 1994 and 1997, 1248 secondary students were placed in student teaching internships; of those 35 (2.8%) failed. The total group includes eleven student teachers who failed once and were placed in subsequent internships, with eight successfully completing student teaching the second time. Three of these student teachers attempted and failed twice; each incident of failure was coded separately bringing the total number of failure cases included in this study to 38.

Procedures

Student files were obtained from the university's Office of Field Experiences. Each student's file contained a variety of documentation, with some inconsistencies of information across files. Some files contained transcripts from this college and other colleges students attended, other files did not. Most files contained a Case Conference Report documenting the removal process, a few did not. Other information used in our analysis included memos from the supervisor and/or cooperating teacher, certification program or student teaching applications, notes from faculty, and written responses to failure from the student teachers. We accessed the university student data base to acquire demographic and grade report information not contained in the files.

Based on our literature review, we created coding sheets with three categories of student teacher failure: Personal Characteristics, Performance Indicators, and Contextual Factors. Personal characteristics included such descriptors as work habits, previous behavior indicators, personality characteristics, life stresses and health issues, personal interaction skills, philosophical statements, and professionalism issues. Performance indicators included the skills of planning, instruction, content knowledge, discipline and management, and interpersonal communication in the classroom. Contextual factors included cooperating teacher mismatch, supervisor issues, placement choice, adjustment to school setting, and reality checks of understanding the nature of teaching. These categories closely replicate those reported by Sudzina and Knowles (1993) in their study of failure.

We decided it was important to determine the primary reason for failure and possible secondary reasons. To maximize reliability, we independently rated the primary and secondary reasons for failure. We then compared ratings and reached agreement on the causes for failure by discussing cases we had coded differently. We also specified whether student teachers were removed from student teaching, usually by the supervisor or school personnel, or decided to quit on their own. After coding the files, it was

apparent that in many cases university personnel could have removed a student teacher, but through conferencing and counseling may have helped the student teacher to make the final decision. These student teachers were coded as voluntary withdrawals because the documentation from the final case conference reported that it was their own decision.

The demographic characteristics for each student who failed and the randomly selected group of those who succeeded were entered into a data base. Comparative statistics were computed to determine if these characteristics varied by groups.

Results

The demographic comparisons between the failure and success groups indicated that the two groups varied on some important characteristics. In our sample, the most prevalent reasons for failure were related to personal characteristics, followed by performance indicators and contextual factors. Our findings for each of these categories are presented in Table 1.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

Demographic Information and Group Comparisons

One objective of this study was to identify characteristics of students who failed student teaching, and to compare them to students who succeeded. The results of the comparative statistics indicate that the failure group differed significantly from the success group on the characteristics of gender, age, number of previous educational institutions attended, and grades in our assessment and management class. Although 40% of the students placed in internships were males, males comprised 60% of the failure cases. In addition, the failure group is older than the success group, has previously attended more educational institutions, and they earned lower grades in our assessment and management course. No significant differences were found on the number of

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previous occupations, cumulative GPA, grades in the planning course, or grade level of placement.

Primary Reasons for Failure

Primary reasons for failure were coded for all cases. The main categories--personal characteristics, performance indicators, and contextual factors--were subdivided for clarity of analysis. The primary reasons for failure are presented in Table 2.

[Insert Table 2 about here]

Personal Reasons. In our sample, personal characteristics were identified as the primary reason for failure in 21 of our 38 cases. As we further analyzed these cases, we subcategorized them as relating to students' commitment to teaching, personal circumstances (known and unknown), interpersonal relations problems, and medical circumstances. In addition, we had two cases that were idiosyncratic and are reported separately in a subcategory titled "other."

The single biggest reason for students to withdraw from student teaching in our sample was a decision that teaching was not for them; eight students in our sample voluntarily left their internships after deciding that the teaching profession was not a good fit. One intern, according to her supervisor's memo, "did not feel comfortable in her role as a teacher and felt her strengths working with adolescents could be better used in other fields." Another indicated he "did not feel comfortable going into the teaching profession and had not for the past year" (supervisor memo). Three others indicated that their attitudes toward the job made it difficult to continue: one noted that "many mornings I feel like 'ugh'" (reported in supervisor memo); another indicated lacking a "personal readiness and vision for completing the internship at this time" (case conference report); and a third reported to his supervisor that he had "lost his focus and

enthusiasm for teaching and that his expectations for the maturity level of high school students had not been realized" (supervisor memo). It is interesting to note that there were indications of skills deficits in only one of these cases—in four others there are specific notes that the interns were meeting performance expectations, and in two of these cases doing commendable jobs. Rather, the cases coded under this category contained clear indications that students had made a personal decision that the profession was not for them.

Personal circumstances were the primary reason for failure for five of our students. In three of these cases the exact circumstances were unspecified. The two other cases coded as personal circumstances included family concerns. One intern understandably ended his internship because he was unable to focus on student teaching after the death of his sister. The second intern assured his supervisor that his decision "was related to his internship only by the factor of time as he felt he must be at home due to an emergent family situation" (supervisor memo). For each of these five interns, it was something happening in their personal lives, not something happening in the classroom, that led to their failure during student teaching.

An inability to communicate with others in a professional manner led to the eventual removal of two of the interns in our sample. In one of these cases a pattern of such behaviors was noted in a variety of documents; prior to student teaching the intern had conferences with advisors who had noted his "erratic behavior" and "mood swings and outbursts" (advisor memo) while he was taking classes. During his student teaching, this student displayed a difficulty in accepting criticism and stopped communicating with his supervisor and cooperating teacher. A second intern displayed "argumentative posturing regarding feedback to assist his growth" according to the principal at his

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school; the intern terminated his placement voluntarily due to what his supervisor deemed an inability to resolve conflicts.

Four of our students experienced medical problems that led to their failure. The case conference report for one of these students indicated "the student withdrew from his internship for medical reasons;" this student was later granted a second internship and received exceptional ratings. A second student in this category apparently experienced mental health problems; his case conference report indicated that prior to being placed in a subsequent internship "documentation from a certified state mental health professional that his illness is under control" would be required. A third case in this category contained indications of both physical and possible emotional problems. The student was performing adequately at her midterm but her performance declined seriously once she assumed a full load of teaching. The case conference note indicates that a medical condition and that the stress of assuming full-time teaching duties were primary factors in her inability to perform. This student teacher was later granted a second internship which she completed with adequate to satisfactory ratings. The final case in this category was a student who was confined to a wheelchair and became very depressed following back surgery.

Two additional cases of failure were attributed to idiosyncratic personal reasons. In one of these cases, the administrators of a middle school requested that the intern be removed when they discovered he had taken inappropriate pictures of students from the school. Upon discovering this breech of professionalism, the administrators asked that the student teacher be removed from their building. Another student voluntarily left his internship when he encountered philosophical differences with the public school system that he felt he could not personally resolve. In a letter explaining his reasons for leaving

the internship, he expressed how his philosophy and approach to discipline differed from what he felt was expected in the public school setting.

In summary, we found a wide range of personal reasons for student teacher failure in our sample. The most frequent reason for failure coded under this category was a personal decision on the part of the student to leave the profession of teaching. In addition, a number of students failed due to some personal circumstances—medical or otherwise—that eventually led to their inability to perform at a satisfactory level.

Performance Indicators. Consistent with previous research, performance in the classroom proved to be a critical indictor for some student teachers. We found that student teachers who fell into this category either had multiple skill deficiencies in the classroom or had specific indicators that we labeled as classroom presence and management. Five student teachers had a mixture of problems, four were removed and one quit. The other six student teachers had presence difficulties; four were removed and two quit.

When student teachers displayed skills deficits, there were often multiple problems. For example, one file included these comments: "His planning and discipline skills, however, combined with his difficulty in dealing with multiple tasks simultaneously, seriously impeded his effectiveness as a teacher. . . He needs additional instruction and practice in writing both long-range plans and daily lesson plans." (university supervisor documentation).

Another file contained these comments. "It became apparent during my observation that several of the concerns raised by (the cooperating teacher) and (the supervisor) were accurate. Those concerns were that there was a lack of energy and

enthusiasm in the delivery of the materials. Additionally, the lesson designs contained several major flaws that kept class from being meaningful" (letter from principal).

Classroom presence and management proved to be critical for many student teachers. This category includes those students whose classroom "withitness" needed improvement. Their inability to sense activity (or lack of it!) resulted in management problems. One student's problems were described as follows: "overall demeanor, vocal projection, enunciation and subject matter enthusiasm seemed to be underlying factors" for failure (case conference report). Another student teacher had documentation that stated she "lacked presence during classroom presentations, failed to identify inappropriate behavior, displayed inappropriate behavior, displayed a fear of the students and was unable to see and process what was going on in the classroom" (case conference report).

One teacher asked for comments from her students on the student teacher's classroom presence. The following are a few samples:

> I think we could walk out of the room, and he wouldn't know it. It's like he doesn't know we're here.
> This guy needs to get a personality.
> If he ever really looked at us, he might know how boring he is.
> It's hard to believe that he really likes teaching, and even harder to believe he likes kids. (cooperating teacher letter)

In summary, a variety of skill deficiencies led to the removal or withdrawal of 11 students in our sample. These students had multiple skill problems or difficulty with presence and classroom management. Also of importance is that only one of these students attempted a second internship, which he subsequently failed.

Contextual Factors. This was the category with the fewest number of failure cases in our sample. Student teachers who failed because of contextual problems usually

had a conflict with their cooperating teachers or experienced problems related to their placements.

Conflicts with cooperating teachers were documented in four of our failure cases, often with harsh, emotional reports. One student teacher felt the teacher "betrayed him." Another student teacher felt she had "irreconcilable differences" in philosophy with her cooperating teacher (she believed that artwork shown in the class was sexist) and quit her first experience. One file documented that the student teacher "withdrew from her internship because she felt that there were insurmountable communication problems between her and her primary ATF [cooperating teacher]" (case conference report). One cooperating teacher reported that at the end of a verbal confrontation the student teacher was livid and shouted "I am so happy to get out of here. You can take your friggen' job. You have no compassion at all. I haven't slept in 2 nights. I'm out of here. I quit. I quit." (university supervisor's documentation for case conference).

Inappropriate placements were a factor for two of our students. One K-12 art teacher was placed in a self-contained elementary class and was expected to teach all subjects with adaptations for six IEP students. The student immediately exhibited frustration. Upon placement in a secondary classroom for a second experience, the student teacher successfully completed his internship. Another placement problem occurred when a student teacher who was commuting many miles to his school was also working with three different cooperating teachers each day. He found the situation impossible to maintain and requested withdrawal. He too completed a second internship successfully.

Summarizing the contextual data, only six of the 35 student teachers failed for contextual reasons. Cooperating teacher conflicts, typically noted in the literature on

student teacher failure, were credited as the dominant reason for our students' failures. Five of the six student teachers who failed due to contextual factors student taught a second time, with all but one of them succeeding.

Discussion

In this study we examined the characteristics of 38 pre-service teachers placed in middle school or high school placements over a three year period who failed their student teaching experience at a mid-sized public university. In this section we discuss our findings as they relate to the differences found between successful and unsuccessful student teachers in this study.

Demographic Characteristics

A significant finding ($p < .02$) of this study is that male student teachers are more likely to fail than female student teachers in middle and high school settings. This data is consistent with that reported by others (Hall & Serna, 1992; Sudzina & Knowles 1993). The males in this study (n=23) failed almost twice as much as the female student teachers (n=12). Additionally, many of the older males were recently retired military personnel who chose to enter the teaching profession. Perhaps their vision of teaching was different from program expectations and they were less likely to take direction and accept feedback from others, particularly younger female teachers and supervisors.

It is interesting to note that although this gender trend seems consistent in larger studies, the case study reports we found were all of females who had failed student teaching. The small sample of case studies available would seem to indicate that young females are at risk for failure, although personality variables and lack of management skills, rather than age, seemed to be the overwhelming factors in their failure. Additionally, in studies of elementary placements, more females would be at risk for

failure due to the fact that females are overwhelmingly represented at the elementary level. The dearth of case studies on male failure may simply be an artifact of females being more willing to subject themselves to an in-depth study of their failure than their male counterparts.

Age was also a significant factor in the student teacher failure. In our sample, the student teachers who failed were significantly ($p < .000$) older than those who succeeded. The mean age of the failure group (33.1 years) could indicate that the student teacher is either a nontraditional undergraduate student, a post-baccalaureate student who is returning for teacher certification, or is possibly a masters degree candidate. Again, this data is consistent with other reports (Butler, 1998; Knowles & Sudzina, 1991; Sudzina & Knowles, 1993), although this trend was not evident in the study by Hall and Serna (1992). Butler (1998) also concluded that student teaching is different for non-traditional students in how they relate to students and supervisors, and that this difference is worth exploring.

Also significant was the difference in the number of colleges unsuccessful student teachers previously attended. Students who failed attended nearly three other colleges, while successful students, on average, attended one. Attending a number of colleges may indicate an instability on the part of these students, or an inability to commit to a career choice. Combined with our knowledge of gender and age of students in this study, it appears that older students who are changing careers may be at greater risk of failing due to unrealistic expectations or the inability to chance ingrained behaviors. Sudzina and Knowles (1993) noted this trend for both genders; our data confirms the trend.

Close examination of grade data shows that cumulative GPA was an unreliable predictor of student teacher success in this study. It appears that the secondary students

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were doing well in their content courses, but were unable to translate their content knowledge into appropriate pedagogy as teachers. This observation has been made by a number of other researchers (Alilunas, 1977; Hall & Serna, 1992; Rickman & Hollowell, 1981). Further, our finding that grades in the assessment and management course were significantly lower for the failure group is consistent with our analysis of their reasons for failure. In our sample, students who exhibited skills problems had more difficulty with managing students or developing a classroom presence than they did with planning. Increased time in field placements where students have responsibility for discipline and management, along with opportunities for conducting whole-group instruction, might help students to bridge the gap between studying management techniques and applying them.

Personal Circumstances

One-fourth of the students who failed in our sample were unable to complete their internships due to external circumstances that were beyond the control of the teacher preparation program, such as illness or family concerns. Other researchers have also noted that personal circumstances such as financial concerns or personal health can be troublesome for student teachers (Knowles & Sudzina, 1991; Mayer & Goldsberry, 1993). Given the rigors of student teaching, it might be important for students to avoid major life stresses during their internships if at all possible, or for supervisors to advise them to reconsider attempting to student teach when personal circumstances might leave them in an unstable position. Riner & Jones (1993) go as far as suggesting that emotional flexibility and stability, along with assessment of perceptual skills, be used as screening measures.

It was both somewhat heartening and troubling that the biggest single reason students failed was because they decided the teaching profession was not for them. It is encouraging that some students made that decision prior to beginning to work in a career that they discovered was not a good fit for them. It is unfortunate, however, that eight of these students did not recognize that the profession was not for them until their final phase of preparation. Students in our program during the years included in this study were required to complete two separate quarter-long practica in which they spent a minimum of 40 hours in the classroom prior to student teaching. The practica were designed to enable students to gain insight into the realities of teaching; apparently the field experiences, reflective journals, and discussions about teaching in seminars failed to help these students to grasp the realities of the profession.

Skill deficiencies

Almost a third of the students who failed in our sample exhibited skill deficiencies, particularly in the area of classroom management and presence, a finding consistent with those reported by several researchers (Borko, Lilik, & Tomchin, 1987; Ellwein, Graue, & Comfort, 1990; Lowther, 1970; Sudzina & Knowles, 1993). One student in our sample was eventually granted a second internship, which he also failed, indicating that presence problems are difficult to overcome. Instituting more authentic performance assessments, including requirements to demonstrate interpersonal communication skills would help to counter this problem.

Contextual factors

The good news is that when a student teacher had contextual problems in the first student teaching experience, if he or she chose to do another experience, it usually ended in success. Scenarios presented in this category included situations that escalated into

heated arguments. Supervisors must be prepared to diffuse such situations before they become unmanageable and, occasionally, be ready to make difficult decisions and change placements when conflicts become insurmountable. The importance of a good match must be a key consideration when placing student teachers, a conclusion highlighted in previous research (Cotton & Fischer; 1992; Lowther, 1970; Sudzina, Giebelhaus, & Coolican, 1997).

Implications for Teacher Education

Interest in how to prevent failure in student teachers continues to escalate. At a recent annual meeting of the Association of Teacher Educators, two different sessions on student teacher failure (see, Harwood & Collins, 1999; Sudzina, 1999) scheduled at the same time drew standing room only crowds. As teacher education programs and graduates continue to come under increased scrutiny due to higher standards by state and national certification, accreditation, and testing agencies, there is a greater need to document and qualify how we prepare confident and competent teachers. Teacher educators, student teacher supervisors, and field placement officers are looking for data and suggestions to help guide their programmatic decisions, particularly as they relate to the successful screening, placement, and support of student teachers.

This research study confirms several pieces of information teacher educators and student teacher supervisors have long suspected. Student teachers more at risk for failure tend to: be nontraditional students and/or older male career-changers; have attended many colleges before enrolling in teacher preparation; be weaker students in behavior management courses; and have poorer interpersonal skills, either too shy and retiring or too forceful. It is also our observation that at risk students tend to fail more spectacularly and publicly in large comprehensive universities where the student body tends to be more

diverse than in smaller more traditional undergraduate settings where there is often a more homogeneous mix of students and closer control over placement, cooperating teacher, and supervising teacher.

There are many ways teacher preparation institutions are dealing with these issues. These include: (1) more extensive entrance criteria and screening, including interviews, prior to entry into the teacher education program; (2) early field placement experiences at a variety of settings with accompanying check sheets completed by the instructor and cooperating teacher; (3) in-depth counseling early, and at any time, in the program with students who appear to have several at risk factors and documenting all interviews; (4) performance-based assignments, such as case study presentations and mini-lessons, to assess skills in organization and presentation; (5) another layer of screening prior to being admitted into upper level classes; (6) training cooperating teachers what to look for and how to mentor student teachers; (7) selecting exemplary cooperating teachers in professional development schools and/or outstanding educational settings; (8) earlier field visits by supervising teachers for students who have one or more risk factors; (9) assigning responsibility to the student teacher to communicate their concerns and issues with the cooperating and/or supervising teacher weekly, either in person or through e-mail; (10) videotaping student teaching lessons and then analyzing them with the cooperating and/or supervising teacher present; and (11) providing a uniform system of documentation across the program.

Pre-admission Screening

Many teacher preparation institutions are raising the entrance requirements for their undergraduate programs. Consequently, many programs now turn away students with low GPAs and ACT or SAT scores who are at risk of failing the widely-used

PRAXIS testing at the end of their second year. What may still be needed is more comprehensive screening of non-traditional candidates, paying careful attention to their reasons for becoming a teacher (as expressed in interviews or application materials). This might help to pinpoint potential problems and avoid situations in which students discover in student teaching that "teaching is not for me." Offut (1995) suggests such interviews touch on motivation, priorities, willingness to exert effort, and self-confidence. Pratt (1986) reported that pre-admission interviews were the best predictor of success in student teaching. Although conducting such interviews would be a time-consuming screening technique, it may be well worth the time if it enables us to identify candidates who may possess personal characteristics that would make them unsuitable for teaching.

Early Field Experiences

Many teacher education programs are instituting 20-25 hour field placements at every year of their program, starting with the first semester. They are also requiring a variety of placements (urban, suburban, rural) in which pre-service teachers interact with the host teacher and students in documentable meaningful ways, rather than simply observing. Edwards (1996) reports that having students work in a variety of school and social service environments, such as alternative schools or Head Start programs, gives them a more realistic idea of what life in the classroom will be like. These experiences need not be counted for separate credit but absorbed into the regular three or four hour course credit. Targeting potentially at risk students for observations during their early field experiences may help to eliminate some of the problematic factors.

Providing opportunities for reflection during these early experiences may also help us identify students who are at risk. It is important that teacher educators who facilitate these experiences listen carefully to what our students say and write about their

experiences if students express a number of doubts about the profession, individual counseling might help them assess whether or not they want to pursue student teaching placements.

Counseling

Programs are becoming more aware of the need to attend to and document not only academic weaknesses, but personality variables or personal characteristics that may be unsuitable for teaching as well. This can be a very sensitive issue. Documenting items such as verbally aggressive or extremely critical or negative attitudes can be accomplished using checklists of a range of desirable and undesirable characteristics. Holding conversations about these behaviors early in a pre-service teacher's program, and suggesting personal counseling, remediation, and/or alternative ways of approaching difficulties has happened informally in the past but in a very hit-or-miss manner. A more common scenario in the past was to avoid these uncomfortable conversations, (often assuming someone else would say something), until things went awry and intervention was unavoidable. Unfortunately, this often occurs during student teaching practica, which may be programmatically unethical (Knowles & Sudzina, 1993).

Performance-based Assignments

Since there is consistent research that indicates students who fail often have problems with planning or management skills, pre-service teacher education should provide as many authentic ways for students to demonstrate these skills as possible. Writing cohesive curriculum units and daily lesson plans, which can be collected in portfolios, is one approach. It is also important that students have the opportunity to teach in classrooms prior to their student teaching. In addition, observation of early field practica can help us to identify students who lack presence or who may have difficulty

managing a classroom. Catching these problems early can lead to skill development prescriptions or counseling out of the program.

Another element of authentic assessment that is useful is continual self-analysis. Student teachers are capable of analyzing their performance (see Borko, Lilik, & Tomchin, 1987; Ellwein, Graue, & Comfort, 1990; Lowther, 1970;); providing opportunities for reflective teaching and self-assessment throughout their internships could enable students to improve their skills. This focus becomes more important when we recognize that problems with skills may plague novice teachers who gain certification, and are contributing factors to failure early in their careers (Young, 1989).

Mid-Program Screening

Many teacher preparation programs are instituting a mid-program screening in which teacher educators review the files of each candidate before formally admitting them into to the teacher education program and allowing them to take upper level methods classes. Documentation includes such items as field placement checklists, PRAXIS scores, overall GPA, GPA in teaching courses, and a performance assessment such as a mini-lesson. Additionally, candidates must make formal application for continuing the program, based on a reassessment of their skills and desires to teach.

Selection and Training of Cooperating Teachers

One of the more interesting findings in recent studies on student teacher supervision was that very few cooperating teachers were adequately prepared to supervise and/or mentor student teachers (Sudzina & Coolican, 1994; Sudzina, Giebelhaus, & Coolican, 1997). Traditionally, the master teachers in the school would be called on to supervise student teachers. Sometimes very highly skilled teachers have difficulty in mentoring beginners and may forget the developmental process of learning

to teach. In addition, few of these teachers had been trained in student teacher supervision methods, and most were unclear of their role in giving feedback. Providing cooperating teachers with guidance and training in observational and conferencing techniques would help them to be more effective mentors (see Guyton, 1989).

Early Field Visits

One of the problems documented by researchers in looking at failure (Knowles & Sudzina, 1991; Knowles, Skrobola, & Coolican, 1995) was how quickly at risk student teachers found themselves in difficulty. Communicating early and frequently with the cooperating teacher, through voice mail or e-mail, and early field experience visits may help us avoid pulling a teacher from their practica mid-semester. It may also help us avoid failure due to contextual problems such as inappropriate placements or severe conflicts with the cooperating teacher. In those cases, speedy removal of a student teacher to a more compatible placement may avoid anguish for all parties as well as the time and expense of a second student placement in a new semester.

Student Teacher Responsibilities

More teacher preparation programs are communicating to student teachers that they are part of a triad in the student teaching experience involving them, their cooperating teacher, and their university supervisor. All partners need to be clear about the practica goals and expectations, and roles and responsibilities, which should be written and articulated to all partners (see Sudzina, Giebelhaus, & Coolican, 1997). If there are problems in the placement, it is up to the student teacher to communicate with the supervising teacher in a timely fashion, thus avoiding escalating tensions and/or unpleasant surprises when it comes time to observe them.

Video-taping Student Teaching Lessons

Taping lessons can be a very useful tool to help students learn to be effective self-evaluators. In addition, watching tapes with both the student and mentor teacher gives the supervision team the opportunity to verify their analyses of the lesson. It can also provide an invaluable record of what went right - or wrong - in an individual's practica.

Documentation

Finally, it is essential to consistently and professionally document student progress throughout the program. Early flagging of students who may be at risk, combined with remediation or counseling, can be effective means of preventing failure during student teaching. A systematic review of progress, beginning with early performance assessments, videotapes and a portfolio of student work, can be proactive tools for helping eliminate problems and prevent failure before it happens. Beyond providing students with clear and specific feedback, the documentation can help universities make a clear case for remediation or dismissal from the program. One of the problems associated with all the failure literature was the lack of information in student records to reconstruct the causes, extent, and correlates of failure in student teaching. Because the process of failing a student can sometimes involve legal challenges, this documentation can prove invaluable.

Conclusion

For over thirty years educational researchers have been striving to define what makes an "effective" teacher. Nonetheless, preparing education students to enter the profession of teaching remains a complex and challenging task. Faculty at colleges of education nationwide are reflecting on their practice as a result of newly emerging state and national standards and the growing accountability movement. If one of our goals as

teacher educators is to ensure that new teachers meet the highest standards of performance, it is necessary that we continue to examine how education programs in general, and student teaching experiences in particular, contribute to the development of best teaching practices.

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Table One: Demographic Characteristics of Successful and Failed Student Teachers

Characteristics	Failed	Successful	Comparative Statistic
Gender			X^2 (1, N=133) =
Male	23	42	5.39, p = .02
Female	12	56	
Level of Placement			X^2 (1, N=131) = .86,
Middle School	12	25	p = .35
High School	23	71	
Age	M = 33.1 SD = 9.42	M = 27.7 SD = 6.54	t(130) = 3.12, p=.000
Previous Ed. Institution	M = 2.71 SD = 1.85	M = 1.25 SD = 1.10	t(117) = 4.96, p = .000
Previous Occupation	M = 2.00 SD = 1.35	M = 1.90 SD = 1.28	t(107) = .255, p = .799
Cumulative GPA	M = 3.39 SD = .33	M = 3.47 SD = .32	t(129) = 1.09, p = .275
Planning Course Grade	M = 3.49 SD = .72	M = 3.54 SD = .57	t(118) = .358, p = .734
Mgmt./Assess Course Grade	M = 3.49 SD = .53	M = 3.71 SD = .44	t(127) = 2.25 p = .03

Table Two: Primary Reasons For Student Teacher Failure (n=38)

	Failure Initiation				
Reason For Failure	Supervisory Removal	Voluntary Withdrawal	Total	Successful 2nd Attempt	Failed 2nd Attempt
PERSONAL (n=21)					
Teaching Not for Me	0	8	8	0	0
Personal Circumstances	1	4	5	0	1
Interpersonal Comm.	1	1	2	0	0
Medical	1	3	4	2	0
Other	1	1	2	1	0
PERFORMANCE (n=11)					
Multiple Skills	4	1	5	0	0
Management/Presence	4	2	6	0	1
CONTEXTUAL (n=6)					
Coop. Teacher Conflicts	1	3	4	3	1
Placement	0	2	2	2	0